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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 003241

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CVIS](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN JOURNALIST SEEKING REFUGE IN U.S.

REF: A. (A) COTONOU 01391

[1](#)B. (B) FBIS 231333Z NOV 02
[1](#)C. (C) FBIS 261554Z NOV 02
[1](#)D. (D) FBIS 251331Z NOV 02
[1](#)E. (E) FBIS 231836Z NOV 02
[1](#)F. (F) FBIS 300852Z NOV 02
[1](#)G. (G) FBIS 231748Z NOV 02
[1](#)H. (H) FBIS 271510Z NOV 02
[1](#)I. (I) FBIS 261423Z NOV 02
[1](#)J. (J) FBIS 271434Z NOV 02
[1](#)K. (K) FBIS 291153Z NOV 02
[1](#)L. (L) FBIS 291731Z NOV 02

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reason: 1.5 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Mr. Uzor Daniel, father of Ms. Isioma Daniel, the journalist whose controversial article sparked the recent riots in Nigeria, came to the Consulate General in Lagos on December 2 seeking help for his daughter to gain refugees status and subsequent entry into the U.S. He confirms that Ms. Daniel remains in hiding in Benin Republic. He fears his daughter is not safe in Africa, and requests that we not share this information with Nigerian authorities for fear that his daughter's safety will be compromised. Amnesty International subsequently contacted Poloff to discuss the case following Mr. Daniel's visit; he says he is in touch with a Conoff in her present location. Simon Gbenga Kolawole, the editor of This Day and his family, face a similar threat. We believe that Ms. Daniel confronts a well-founded fear of persecution. We recommend that the Department explore means to provide assistance. We lack sufficient information to address whether any other person associated with this episode, including members of the Daniel and Kolawole families, face well-founded fear of persecution. End summary.

[1](#)3. (U) Background. Many people in Nigeria blame Ms. Daniel's article "The World at their Feet," published in ThisDay Newspaper on November 15, for sparking rioting which reportedly killed 150-250 persons and injured or displaced hundreds more in Kaduna and Abuja beginning November 20 and lasting for several days. The article, considered blasphemous by the Muslim community, has attracted international criticism from as far as India and Kenya. Deputy Governor Mamuda Shinkafi of Zamfara State and other individuals have pronounced a "fatwah" sentence of death against Ms. Daniel. The Federal Government has called the fatwah a nullity. Other religious and political leaders questioned the legitimacy of the purported fatwah. On November 28, Dr. Lateef Adegbite, Secretary General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), declared Zamfara State's fatwah sentence against Ms. Daniel illegitimate and stated that it "should not be followed." Reports quoted Adegbite as welcoming Ms. Daniel to return to Nigeria and expressed his "surprise that she fled the country." Other Islamic religious leaders have also criticized the fatwah, stating it has no force or effect; many have urged Muslims to accept ThisDay's statements of apology and remorse. However, the Zamfara Deputy Governor has not retracted his fatwah, and Governor Ahmed Sani, on Umrah, apparently has not spoken out.

[1](#)4. (C) On December 2, Mr. Uzor Daniel, CEO of SoundHaus International, LTD. approached the Consulate General in Lagos, claiming he was the father of Ms. Daniel. He delivered a letter addressed to the Consul General under the heading "re: Application for Political Asylum for Miss Isioma Daniel (Journalist)." Text follows.

[1](#)5. (C) Quote. My name is UZOR DANIEL and I am the father of Miss Isioma Daniel, 21, the journalist with THIS DAY newspaper who wrote the controversial Miss World article that resulted in the Kaduna/Abuja riots. In the heat of the crisis I spirited her across the border to brothers in the Republic of Benin for safety. Following the death sentence passed on her by the Zamfara State Islamic Government, we contacted Amnesty International, London, and through the help of their Mr. Enrique Restoy (+447986858272) she has applied to the USA embassy in

Cotonou for political asylum in USA. However, since she is not normally resident in that country, we wish to approach your embassy to kindly assist in every way possible to get her out of reach any harm as quickly as possible. If it were possible for her to be with the embassy there, while her application is being processed, that would be appreciated. She can be reached on 009-229 95 21 59 in the meantime.

16. (C) Quote continued. Secondly, for the rest of us in the family, myself and two teenage children, (my wife is currently visiting the US), I also wish to request that in case there is any extension of hostilities to us as result of this controversy, we shall be asking for your protection as well. So far we have not had any cause to fear for ourselves, even though our identity is being very closely guarded. My contact phone is 08023161437. I will like to know who to call in case of emergency. Thank you and God bless. Yours sincerely, [signed] Uzor Daniel. End quote.

17. (C) Mr. Daniels explained to Conoffs that he told his daughter to return to his home after violence broke out against the ThisDay newspaper office on November 20. He said the State Security Service (SSS) was unable to find and question her before Mr. Daniel spirited her into hiding out of concerns for her safety. Mr. Daniel said his daughter was schooled in the UK, but her student visa had expired. Her Nigerian passport had also expired, he said, and had not been renewed. He said he took her across the Nigerian-Benin border without authorization from the authorities of either country. Because he fears that Nigerian authorities might publicly disclose the location of his daughter, he does not want to approach the Nigerian authorities to request a passport renewal or to discuss her case. He placed her in the home of a trusted friend in Benin for safe-keeping while he tried to seek asylum on her behalf through Amnesty International. Amnesty is in touch with her there, he said.

18. (C) Poloff inquired whether anyone had asked his daughter to make the statement which was construed as blasphemous in order to provoke a violent societal reaction. Mr. Daniel insisted that the statement was of her own creation and had not been intended to offend anyone. He indicated that the article was an isolated mistake on the part of a very young adult in a new profession.

19. (C) Later on December 2, the Information Resource Officer at the Consulate's Public Affairs Section received a request for visa assistance for the editor of ThisDay, Simon Gbenga Kolawole, his wife, Abimbola Sherifat Kolawole, and their six month old daughter, Fiyinfoluwa Naomi Kolawole. The "head of travels" of ThisDay, who passed the Kolawole family's request on to the Consulate, said the family is under the same threat as Ms. Daniel. We do not know if the family is in hiding.

110. (C) Comment. Despite public assurances by various leaders that the fatwah is improper, subsequent reports call into question the Government's ability to contain public sentiment against the reporter and prevent violence against her person. On November 29, one 57 year old civil servant from Zamfara stated to the press, "If she comes to northern Nigeria, I'll do my duty as a Muslim. I'll kill her." Another Zamfara trader remarked, "That woman must die, I'm ready to take care of it myself." Extremists in some parts of Nigeria may therefore choose to honor the previously issued fatwah calling for Ms. Daniel's death. Regarding the Zamfara Deputy Governor's purported fatwah, Hardline Islamic leader Shehu Maishanu said, "He simply said what is in the Koran, that is that someone who insults the Prophet must die. It's the duty of all Muslims to kill her. It's too late for excuses. The only way she can escape her punishment is to convert [to Islam]."

111. (C) Comment continued: Because of the statements of Zamfara Deputy Governor Shinkafi and of some Islamic hardliners, we believe that Ms. Daniel has a reasonable and well-founded fear of persecution. The threat of violence against her here remains real. We believe the USG should support her application for refugee status. While no "fatwah" has been pronounced against Mr. Kolawole, it would be difficult to contend that he, as the editor responsible for the offensive edition, would not have a well-founded fear of persecution should he assert it. We therefore would support refugee status for Mr. Kolawole, as well, should he seek it. We lack the information necessary to determine whether other persons, including Uzor Daniel, face a well-founded fear of persecution. We are not aware

of any threats against them, but we will further explore
this question and report if such threats exist.
JETER